

THE ASTRONOMER'S DISCOVERY.



ON the most exposed point of the little island of Veen, which stands in the strait between Elsinore and Copenhagen, there were still visible, some few years since, the traces of an ancient and extensive building, where the ruins of time-eaten and fire-stained walls, rising over the rugged and volcanic surface, guided the eye along the ground-plan of the edifice. It might have been observed that this structure, of which the relics even still retain the name Uranienborg, was flanked on the north by a tower; to the east and west it presented two fronts, looking respectively toward the isle of Zealand and the coast of Sweden; and on the south had stood a large square building, named Stalleborg—that is, the “Castle of the Stars,”—under which lay a vaulted cavern, the only portion still remaining uninjured. All around were vestiges of garden cultivation, long since discontinued; and the silence of the desert that stretched away until it mingled in hazy perspective with the waters of the Baltic was broken only by the wild scream of the sea-birds. Still, these ruins awakened an interest of their own: for, although they were not the scene of any memorable event in history, or the grave of departed magnificence, the glory of intellect and science has bequeathed to them its more enduring associations.

On the 11th of November, 1572, the lord of

this domain, which is about two leagues in circumference, was seated in the garden of Uranienborg. The day had been clearer and milder than might naturally have been expected at that season and in such a climate, and the sun was just sinking behind the trees, whose lengthening shadows were sharply defined on the ground by the last beams of daylight. The person whom we introduce might have been still called young; but in his countenance there was a seriousness and dignity beyond his years, which would have repelled familiarity, had not the expression been softened by that air of simplicity which always accompanies genius. He was engaged in tracing on the sand before his feet circles within circles, of different sizes, and intersecting each other perplexingly; and from these he sometimes turned his eyes upward to the heavens, as though they opened to his view a mystic volume which he endeavoured to transcribe. At his left hand was sleeping a beautiful greyhound, wearied with gambolling around its master without attracting his attention; while, crouching timidly at the other side, sat a young and beautiful girl, who alternately gazed, with a rapt and child-like curiosity, at the geometric figures, and looked up at the face of her abstracted companion as if endeavouring to read in those moveless features the solution of the enigma. She understood, however,

neither the meaning of those complicated lines nor the purpose of that deep meditation; and, yet, she sat there, statue-like, animated by another spirit than his; for both were lost in their several contemplations—the one withdrawn from the present by study, the other by love.

At length he moved uneasily, and the faint shadow of discontent that passed across his face was reflected on hers as on a mirror.

"What if it were all but a delusion?" he murmured; "which of the two shall I make my guide—Science or Faith? The first has told me from my childhood that I shall one day detect the periods and movements of 'those stars with which the heaven is diadem'd,' and teach these mysteries to a listening world; and the second says to me, 'Thy knowledge comes from God, and thou shalt not use it to contradict him.' And, after all, why those involuntary doubts and fears? Why does reason rebel, when the heart submits? Is it the truth which I decry in the cloudy distance, or a dream of the fancy that grows restless as it looks into the infinite?"

While he questioned himself thus, the evening breeze came sighing through the bare branches, and swept away the circles on the sand.

"So it is," he said, with a sigh; "the breath of forgetfulness, perhaps, will efface my name and my labours from the remembrance of men. If it must be so, were it not better, now, to forsake a world where nothing shall survive to tell that I have been?"

"You wish to die!" said the girl, looking up anxiously, for his last words had startled her. "You do not care for me more? I having nothing to offer but affection; if that wearies you, tell me! It was you who first told me of my beauty, and I prized it because you spoke of it; I was proud of being beautiful, because it drew your eyes toward me. This pride and pleasure you can take from me, as you gave them, for I am but a low-born ignorant peasant girl."

"And why should I not love you still, Christina?" said Tycho Brahe. "It is I rather who should be afraid that you may weary of me—dark and silent creature that I am. I have more often made you sigh than smile, and it is for me to ask and wonder why you love me."

"If you change not, my lord," she replied, "I surely never will. It is enough that once you said to me, 'Come here, Christina, my head is tired—your youth and beauty restore me to myself.'"

"Child," said he, smiling, and twining her long golden hair upon his fingers, "hast thou no more to ask of me? Is a careless word enough to make thee happy?"

"It is, my lord! the evening when you met me before my father's door—who is a poor peasant, and your vassal—I felt myself blushing, and cast down my eyes. The next day, when you met me again, and spoke to me, I felt the same uneasiness; and since then I have loved you as a god, without understanding you, for I knew that I could not share your thoughts that are so far above me. The spirits of pious worshippers, they tell me, are often rewarded for their faith; often a ray of heavenly light falls upon them, and

explains mysteries which they have believed blindly; and so I hoped that you might, one day, raise me to your own height, and teach me the language in which you speak to the stars, so that our two spirits may never separate, and I may be with you in another world as I am in this! You tell me, sometimes, that you have learned awful secrets that could change the face of the world; that there are in common things around us, in plants and metals, virtues unknown to all others, that could enable you to create and to destroy; could you not, then, some time, make a charm or a philtre for me, so that I, too, might read the stars?"

"Hush, Christina!" said the philosopher. "Though God has permitted me to guess a few of his mysteries, ignorant men would hunt me to the death if I were to seem to know them. But what you ask of me is impossible."

"I thought," said Christina, "you could do it, if you would. I know not what other women think of the men whom they love; but I have been accustomed to place you so far above all others, that I can imagine no limit to your knowledge and your power. Give me, at least, the skill to read the future, that I may know if you will love me always."

"Fear not, Christina," he answered, "until the day when I saw you, my only love was science. Many women have sought to please me; but I wanted the time and the address to please them: others have looked upon me as a fool. I have taken my way firmly amid the insults and injuries of the nobility, who are indignant to behold one of their class renounce his hereditary ignorance, and cast away the sword to study the great works of the Creator. But here I have found a haven where the elements are at rest, and where my life may flow on in peace and industry. To-morrow, Christina, you shall set out for Copenhagen. I shall give you a letter to my good friend King Frederic the Second. I will tell him that I wish to make you my wife; and, as a Danish noble cannot marry out of his own order without his permission, I will ask his consent to our union."

These words, bewildering poor Christina with a tumult of emotions, in which actual joy in its common form could be scarcely said to predominate, sent the crimson blood glowing into her face, which was the next instant overspread with the paleness of marble.

"Thanks, thanks!" she murmured; "it is what I could never have dared to ask, and yet I have suffered much. Forsaken by you, I would be despised by the world. My father is unhappy; he does not believe me innocent; and the girls of the island look aside when I pass."

"I shall reward your devotion, Christina. Console your father, and henceforth bear your head high and proudly among your acquaintances; for no whisper of suspicion shall breathe upon you more! But the night is falling dark and chilly, adieu! To-morrow, at break of day, be ready to depart."

With the light and buoyant step of sudden gladness she left him. He followed her with his eyes until she was lost in the darkness, and then moved away slowly to Stalleborg.

"Poor child!" said he, "how little it needs to make thee happy! You know not those vast and insatiable longings—that indefinable want of knowledge that grows for ever—the aspiration of the soul toward the infinite."

Raising his eyes to the cloudless and spangled heaven, "Is it an illusion?" he cried, as he fixed his gaze upon a star, till then unnoticed, that blazed brilliantly near the constellation of Cassiopea. "Look there!" said he to his attendants. "Do I dream? See you that flashing globe that hangs there over the tower?"

"Yes, my lord," they answered; "and its light eclipses all the neighbouring stars."

"Whence comest thou, then," said he, "new and unknown world? O science, inexhaustible and sublime, thou art still my only love!"

He withdrew hastily, and shut himself into his observatory. Christina and all other earthly things were soon forgotten before the new celestial visitor.

By the dawn of the next morning, Christina, habited for her voyage, was waiting anxiously the moment when she could speak with the astronomer; but his assistants had been ordered to permit none to interrupt him. Succeeding at last in transmitting a message to him—that she was ready to start for Copenhagen, according to the arrangement of the evening before—she was entrusted with a letter addressed to the king; and placing that most precious document in her bosom, hastened to the boat, which awaited her; and, as the weather was favourable, arrived in Copenhagen the same day, and presented herself at the palace. The notorious aversion of Frederic the Second from everything in the shape of ceremony and etiquette, together with his respect for Tycho Brahe, whose reputation he considered an honour to his reign, of course smoothed away all difficulties in the way of an audience; and Christina in a few minutes found herself in the presence of a little, affable, plainly dressed, elderly gentleman. While he was reading the letter, she breathed an earnest prayer that he might not refuse its request, on which the happiness of her life depended; and anxiously watched his majesty's countenance, thinking it strange that he never raised his eyes to look at her, or showed any symptom of surprise.

"Tell him," said the king, quietly laying aside the letter, "that I will do what he desires. I shall give the necessary orders at once."

"Indeed, sire?" said Christina, "you consent, then? I was dreading a refusal."

"Why should I refuse, child?" said the king.

"Because, sire, I am only the daughter of a poor peasant, and he is a noble."

"And what has that to do with it?" said his Majesty in some astonishment, "there must be some mistake! Do you know that he is only asking me for a book?"

"A book, sir!" repeated the amazed Christina. "I thought he asked your Majesty's consent to our marriage!—he always said he loved me!"

"I have no doubt he does," replied Frederic, laughing. "But a new star, it seems, has made

him forget the old one. Here! read what he says, for yourself!"

On this discovery all poor Christina's hopes took wing, and flew away ever so high above her head. She took the letter despondingly, and read these words:

SIRE,—A new star has appeared to me this evening. I am in need of a book which is indispensable to my calculations, for I cannot altogether trust my memory. The observatory of Leipzig contains a copy of the work of Leovitius, which I remember to have read in my youth. Will your Majesty be so good as to have it sent to me with all convenient expedition?

"Tell him from me," continued the king, "that he shall have it within a week, and scold him at the same time for thinking more of the book than of yourself."

"Sire," said Christina, "I will go myself to Leipzig—since the book is so important that it has made him forget to make me happy. I wish him to receive it from my own hands."

"No, no, child," said Frederic, "they would not entrust it to you. Return to Veen and have patience with your disappointment! Tycho Brahe will most probably send you to me again in a day or two."

"I hope so, sire," said Christina with a sigh; "for I am sure he loves me, and did not mean to deceive me."

On her arrival in Veen, she returned to her father's house, and was forbidden by him to visit Uranienborg again—a superfluous prohibition, for Tycho Brahe still remained in his observatory and seemed to have altogether forgotten this lower world. His nights were spent in gazing upon the strange and beautiful visitor whose brilliancy outshone Venus; and his days in consulting the records and calculations of his predecessors. His eyes constantly bent upon it, he measured its distance and inquired of himself how a new world had been suddenly lighted up in space, and whether it should remain fixed where he saw it, or retire again into the dark and measureless depths from which it had come forth. He took possession of it, like a navigator who appropriates a newly discovered land; he gave it his name, and commanded it to tell of him to future generations.

One doubt, however, cast a shadow upon his exultation—others in times past had probably observed the same mass of radiance. He found in Josephus that a star of the same magnitude and brilliancy had shone over Jerusalem and announced its fall. Hipparchus had seen it outblazing Cassiopea and paling again beside that constellation; and the more recent work of Leovitius, which was sent by the king, informed him of the appearance of the same star three hundred years before. Still he gazed upon it unweariedly—days and weeks flew away unmeasured. When clouds hid it from his view, he was impatient; when it shone out in the clear expanse his ecstasy returned. In fact, it was no longer mere science that guided him with its inflexible laws, but a glowing imagination—that spirit of poetry which slumbers in every soul—bore him away upon its rainbow-wings.

The star blazed on; but its brightness was fading. From a pure and flaming white it changed to the ruddy glow of Mars and then to the dull and leaden hue of Saturn, as it receded into the limitless wilderness of space. Then there came a heavy drift of grey and watery clouds, and when they passed away—the star was gone!

Straining his eyes into vacancy, through the point where he had last seen it, and then returning to earth with a sigh, the astronomer said, "I have sounded the depths of all science, and have found only doubts and disappointments—vanity of vanities! My heart is empty! What is there to fill the void?" There was no Christina near him to answer; but, two days after, she again visited the palace in Copenhagen, and, as the king had predicted, handed him another letter.

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